MAINE HEALTH ALERT NETWORK



Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC)
(Formerly Bureau of Health)
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**ADVISORY - Important Information **

2009PHADV049

TO: All HAN Recipients

FROM: Dora Anne Mills, M.D., M.P.H., Public Health Director

SUBJECT: Varicella (Chickenpox) Outbreak in Penobscot County

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Outbreak of Varicella (Chickenpox) in Penobscot County

The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention has received notification of four cases of clinically confirmed varicella (chickenpox) among young adults in a residential post-secondary institution in Penobscot County. The vaccination status of all four individuals is unknown.

The purpose of this advisory is:

- To alert providers in the area to an active varicella outbreak
- To recommend varicella vaccination
- To report new cases of varicella to Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821

Background:

Varicella is a highly contagious disease. Humans are the only source of infection. Person-to-person transmission occurs primarily through direct contact with infected individuals and is transmitted occasionally via the airborne route. The incubation period of varicella is generally 14-16 days with a range from 10 to 21 days. Varicella is infectious 1-2 days before to 4-5 days after the onset of the rash. Mandatory varicella vaccination for Maine school children was started in 2003. Studies place the effectiveness of the 2-dose varicella series at over 90%. Breakthrough infection has been reported in vaccinated individuals.

Varicella is most commonly diagnosed by the characteristic rash illness. Laboratory confirmation can be obtained by PCR of scraping from the chickenpox lesions. Varicella illness is reportable to the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, telephone 1-800-821-5821, fax 1-800-293-7534. Laboratory specimens can be submitted to the State Health and Environmental Testing Laboratory (HETL) (Telephone: 207-287-2727, Website: http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/etl/homepage.htm).

Varicella Vaccination:

<u>Preschool-Aged Children</u>: All healthy children should receive their first dose of varicella-containing vaccine routinely at age 12--15 months.

School-Aged Children: ACIP recommends a second dose of varicella vaccine for all children aged 4--6 years (i.e., before entering prekindergarten, kindergarten, or first grade). However, it may be administered at an earlier age provided that the interval between the first and second dose is >3 months.

<u>Children Aged >13 Years</u>: Persons aged ≥13 years without evidence of varicella immunity should receive two 0.5-mL doses of single-antigen varicella vaccine administered subcutaneously, 4--8 weeks apart. If >8 weeks elapse after the first dose, the second dose may be administered without restarting the schedule. Only single-antigen varicella vaccine may be used for vaccination of persons in this age group. MMRV is not licensed for use among persons aged ≥13 years. The risk for transmission of varicella among school-aged children, college students, and students in other postsecondary educational institutions can be high because of high contact rates.

Adults: All healthy adults should be assessed for varicella immunity, and those who do not have evidence of immunity should receive 2 doses of single-antigen varicella vaccine 4--8 weeks apart. Adults who might be at increased risk for exposure or transmission and who do not have evidence of immunity should receive special consideration for vaccination, including 1) health

care practitioners, 2) household contacts of immunocompromised persons, 3) persons who live or work in environments in which transmission of varicella zoster virus is likely (e.g., teachers, day-care employees, residents and staff in institutional settings), 4) persons who live or work in environments in which transmission has been reported (e.g., college students, inmates and staff members of correctional institutions, and military personnel), 5) non-pregnant women of childbearing age, 6) adolescents and adults living in households with children, and 7) international travelers.

Recommendations:

- 1- Continue routine vaccination of all non-immunized children in Penobscot County.
- 2- Report cases of varicella to the Maine CDC disease reporting line at 1-800-821-5821.
- 3- Isolate individuals with active disease until all lesions have crusted over.
- 4- Pregnant women and immunocompromised individuals who have been exposed to varicella should contact their healthcare provider.

For More Information:

- For ACIP recommendations on varicella http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5604a1.htm#tab4
- For pictures of varicella lesions http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/varicella/photos.htm
- For information on specimen collection and laboratory testing for varicella http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/etl/micro/VZV%20Collection.pdf
- For more information on varicella vaccine schedules and recommendations, see http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/varicella/default.htm#recs or call the Maine Immunization Program at 1-800-867-4775.
- Prevention and disease management are summarized in the American Academy of Pediatrics Red Book, 2009 Report of the Committee on Infectious Disease, 28th edition. pp 714-727.